

Messianica ratio. Affinities and Differences in Cohen's and Benjamin's Messianic Rationalism

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The main thesis I intend to defend here is that Benjamin's Messianism is in close connection with his conception of reason ("the sharpened axe of reason") and, particularly, with the paradoxical unity of Mysticism and Enlightenment, which, according to Adorno's famous definition, distinguishes his thought. As a radically anti-magical and anti-mythical conception of the historical time, Benjamin's Messianism has to be considered as an original synthesis between motifs of the mystical tradition of the Jewish Kabbalah and motifs belonging to the rationalist tradition of the Jewish philosophy. Moving from Cohen's standpoint of a continuity between Maimonides and Kant, I will consider therefore the affinity and the differences between his messianic conception of history and that of Benjamin. Since my first book on Benjamin was published, almost thirty-five years ago, I have insisted on the importance for the young Benjamin and his friend Scholem of the confrontation with Cohen's philosophy, as proved by their common reading of *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (Desideri [1980]: 61-67). I believed at that time and I believe with greater conviction now, thanks to the support of new textual sources and to the contributions of many other scholars, that Benjamin contracts a debt, through Cohen, with Kant's and Plato's thought that will mark forever his philosophical research, even if in different ways. Certainly and in the most evident way, Benjamin's philosophy is heir of the Kabbalistic Neoplatonism, with its conception of the infinite degrees of meaning of the Thora. Nevertheless, Benjamin belongs also to the rationalist tradition that begins with Maimonides and establishes then, with the *Aufklärung*, the first great confrontation between the Jewish thought and modernity.

As an heir and interpreter of both traditions, Benjamin's philosophy constitutes therefore an original and unique synthesis. A result of Benjamin's deep relationship with the Platonic theory of ideas and with the transcendental method of Kant is the distance

he keeps – already in *On the Program of the Coming Philosophy* and, with a more definite meaning, in the *Epistemo-Critical Prologue* to the book on the *Trauerspiel* – both from the *Lebensphilosophie*, with its focus on the *Erlebnis*, and from the phenomenology, with its analysis of pure consciousness. The measure of this distance will be given precisely through a systematic and quasi-transcendental connection between idea and experience in the medium of language and exactly through the fact that ideas give themselves as names and, therefore, in the form of an intentionsless truth. As a protagonist of a linguistic turn in philosophy, in a Platonic-Jewish sense, Benjamin's critical thinking turns out to be very soon radically foreign, if not antithetical, to the radical finitude and the negative (abysmal), foundationalism that defines Heidegger's *Dasein* as being-toward-death. Against the syncretistic interpretations that put together, in the late '70s and early '80s, Benjamin's and Heidegger's concept of *Jetztzeit*, in an essay of 1981, *Ad vocem Jetztzeit*, I underscored the radical incompatibility between the two different ways of understanding this word (Desideri [1995a]: 153-166). In a later essay, *Catastrophe and redemption. Benjamin between Heidegger and Rosenzweig*, I reaffirmed the incompatibility between Heidegger's and Benjamin's idea of temporality, opposing – in this context – Benjamin's *katastrophikon*, as structuring form of the historical time, to Heidegger's *ekstatikon*, which unifies the three time modalities in an opening to the future that finds its authenticity in the being-toward-death. To think the relationship between time and eternity is an alive and decisive question for Benjamin, as well as for Rosenzweig. Both, albeit in a different theological-philosophical context, share a common need to raise the issue of the redemption of, and not from, time. "Salvation of the past - I wrote then - means to hold the *Zeit* in *Jetzt*, causing the *Jetzt-zeit* (Desideri [1995b]: 180)". To stop time, the messianic gesture of grasping its inner discontinuity, means for Benjamin to save it: to catch it in its frailty. The gesture of the messianic arrest holds for a moment a truth that threatens to be swallowed up in forgiveness: it takes care of the creatural character of time, of its differential origin (of its consisting of a quasi-nothing), with the aim of restoring the figure (the integral) of its fulfillment.

We should not overlook, for this, the thread that binds Benjamin's *Theses on the concept of history* to the project on the *Paris Arcades* and to the book on Baudelaire that derives from the difficulties and aporias of the first. In both cases, the task is to represent history in what it has of most inconspicuous, disrupted, disjointed, humble, insignificant. Benjamin shows himself faithful to the Platonic program of saving the phenomena in this way. A program that is characterized by a deep unity between ethics and knowledge

and that responds to the apriori of the Idea of Justice. So the anamnesis – the dialectical movement through which the phenomenon is saved or restored to its truth – is stated in Benjamin's Jewish Platonism as a remembrance of the past that nurtures the lamp of knowledge by keeping alive its image, its life that is oppressed and threatened by forgiveness. To save the phenomena means then, for Benjamin, to do justice to them: to give a word to the nameless, to glimpse then in the most marginal aspect the splendor of an eternal and indestructible life.

The image of a truth that escapes if it's not caught at the right moment – an image that recurs in the last period of Benjamin's research, especially in the *Theses* and in the preparatory *Notes and Fragments* to them – cannot be reduced to a meditation on the relationship between truth and contingency and to a purely kairological idea of temporality. Against this conclusion stands its intimate connection with the idea of justice as the Highest Good, which can never be the object of a possession and which calls nevertheless for its fulfillment¹. The term "messianic", in short, cannot be allegorized here, up to the point of being absorbed in a theory of *kairòs*. Insofar as it is "messianic", time becomes intimately critical and demands a conversion of thinking in order to conceive-grasp it. In the light of the complex meaning of the word, the fact that the last Benjamin conceives truth itself as something transient (as the passage itself of time and not only in the passage of it) coincides, paradoxically, with asserting its eternal character. In the terms of Benjamin's essay on Proust, eternity is "intertwined time, not boundless time".

Die Ewigkeit der geschichtlichen Vorfälle festhalten, heißt eigentlich: sich an die Ewigkeit ihrer Vergängnis halten (Holding the eternity of historical events means really: to keep to the eternity of their transience) (Benjamin [2010]: 137).

Keeping to the eternity of the passage (of time) corresponds here with a radical critique of Historismus, as a last *eidolon* to be destroyed for a historical materialism that "enlists the service of theology". Benjamin's position means, then, neither an idolatrous exaltation of the transitoriness, nor a simple negation of historical time from the point of view of an abstract eternity. Keeping to the eternity of passage means rather to consider the category of origin, which is decisive to understand the form of historical time. Retained as something eternal, past converts from something complete into the incompleteness of present and this latter, therefore, can be understood as origin (Ursprung) or dialectical unity of revelation and redemption. In the understanding of this

¹ The reference here is to Benjamin (1995b).

dialectic consists, for Benjamin, the very necessity of messianism, its being intrinsic to a "pure and continuous system of the whole experience" (to use an expression of the essay *On the Program of the Coming Philosophy*). Related to the whole of Benjamin's philosophy, the category of messianism appears as the inner opening of the systematic quartet that is constituted by perception, language, knowledge and truth². The messianic idea represents then the problem, a historical and eternal problem at the same time, of the unity of this systematic quartet. Only considering the logical and theological thread of messianism, it is possible to perceive the fundamental continuity of Benjamin's thought, from the early youth speculation, in which the confrontation with Cohen is influential, to the latest meditation on history. An annotation of November 3, 1917 from Scholem's *Diaries* confirms this in an eloquent way:

Im Gedanken des messianischen Reiches ist das größte Bild der Geschichte gefunden worden, auf dem sich ihre unendlich tiefe Beziehung zu Religion und Ethik aufbaut. Walter sagte einmal: Das messianische Reich ist immer da. Diese Einsicht ist von der größten Wahrheit - aber erst auf einer Sphäre, die meines Wissens nach niemand nach den Propheten erreicht hat. Offenbarung und messianisches Reich sind die Fundamente jüdischer Geschichtsauffassung, deren Einheit eben durch die Thora, die die Geschichte selbst ist, hergestellt wird.

(The greatest image of history is to be found in the idea of the messianic realm. History's endlessly deep relationship to religion and ethics arises out from this thought. Walter once said that the messianic realm is always present, which is an insight of *stupendous* importance. This insight has the greatest truth – though on a plane which I think no one since the prophets has achieved. Revelation and messianic realm are the foundations of the Jewish conception of history, and history's unity is created through the Torah, which is history itself).³

Despite all critical remarks that Benjamin and Scholem, whose opposition to Cohen is always harder than that of his friend, move to Cohen's positions, both share definitely

² I developed this theme in F. Desideri, *L'iniziale quartetto della filosofia di Walter Benjamin*, in W. Benjamin, *Conoscenza e linguaggio. Frammenti II*, a cura di T. Tagliacozzo, Mimesis, Milano 2013, pp. 9-15.

³ G. Scholem, *Tagebücher nebst Aufsätzen und Entwürfen bis 1923, I. Halband 1913-1917*, cit., pp. 270-71 (Engl. trans. *Lamentations of Youth: the Diaries of Gershom Scholem, 1913-1919*, Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 192). On the topic of Messianism in the young Scholem see M. Löwy, *Messianism in the Early Work of Gershom Scholem*, New German Critique, No. 83, Special Issue on Walter Benjamin (Spring - Summer, 2001), pp. 177-191; on Scholem's Messianism in general see also T. Tagliacozzo, *Catastrofe, distruzione, redenzione. Sionismo e messianismo apocalittico in Gershom Scholem*, in AA.VV., *Le vie della distruzione. A partire dal Carattere distruttivo di Walter Benjamin*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2010, pp.143-170.

with Cohen the conviction that the messianic idea implies an "infinitely deep" connection with ethics and religion and that this connection is expressed by the prophetic conception of history which is peculiar to Judaism. To this connection belongs certainly the link between rationalism and monotheism that is at the center of Cohen's posthumous work, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*. As it is known, Cohen conceives this connection in a logical and ethical perspective, in the light of the continuity between Platonism and Kantianism that is made possible by Judaism. According to this continuity, the Platonic idea of the Good, in its transcendence, means an infinite task for humanity and at the same time the constitutive hypothesis of an inherently ethical relationship between reason and world. The religion of reason is stated, then, as a "practical idealism", according to a Cohen's favored formula. It is from this ethical curvature of idealism, which joints in a single community of reason Socrates, Plato and the prophets⁴, that the messianic idea arises. The „great work“ of messianism – Cohen writes – is undoubtedly that of „creating the future“: „die Zukunft der Schöpfung, als der wahrhaften politische Wirklichkeit ist das große Werk des Messianismus“⁵.

Already in this regard – that is the meaning of messianism for a conception of history that is informed by theological and scriptural motifs of the Jewish religion – there are evident aspects of common inspiration and of divergent interpretation between Benjamin and Cohen. However, a more specific understanding of the elements of continuity and discontinuity between the two philosophical perspectives cannot be limited to their common sharing of a religious-cultural background. For this purpose, it will be rather necessary to shift the terms of the comparison further upstream to the logical sphere even before than to the theological one. In other words, my thesis is that the maximum point of convergence and at the same time of difference between Cohen's and Benjamin's thought should be sought in the category of origin. It is in the context of the Ursprung-issue that we can explain similarities and differences in the messianism of both and, more precisely, in their messianic apperception of human rationality.

Before considering in a more articulated way the nexus that binds, for Cohen as well as for Benjamin, the problem of the origin to the topic of messianism, it should be observed that it is the persistent link with Cohen's thought (with the continuum between Platonism, Kantianism and Judaism established by his philosophy) that makes

⁴ See H. Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, hrsg. von B. Strauß, Fourier, Wiesbaden 1966 (1st Edition: 1918), p. 505.

⁵ Ivi, pp. 338-39.

inconsistent and improbable every Gnostic interpretation of Benjamin's idea of history and, consequently, of his diagnosis about modernity. I refer in particular to Taubes' argumentation that interpretes Benjamin's messianism in a Gnostic-Pauline perspective⁶ and considers Benjamin himself as "a modern Marcionite". In addition, I am also referring to the improbable identification that an Italian philosopher sustained between the "little hunchback" of the Theses on the concept of history and Paul's Christological-messianic theology⁷. Undoubtedly, Benjamin's theology, since it is necessary for the authentic understanding of history, is not inspired by Paul's Letters. Without mentioning the fact that the interpretation that the heresy of Marcion gives of the latter is extremely one-sided, because it solves the crux of the relationship between Law and Gospel, between the Old and New Testament in a sheer strangeness and opposition.

As recent studies by Tamara Tagliacozzo, Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky, Peter Fenves, Pierfrancesco Fiorato and other scholars have contributed to clarify⁸, the philosophical connection with Cohen cannot be limited to the early years of Benjamin's formation and, in particular, to the critical balance of the Marburgian Neo-Kantianism that he outlined in the essay *On the Program of the Coming Philosophy*. The philosophical dialogue with Cohen's work (especially with the systematic trilogy which is constituted by the *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, *Die Ethik des reinen Willens* and the *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*) permeates all most significant Benjamin's writings of the first theological/metaphysical period (from *Destiny and character* to the great essay on *Goethe's Elective Affinities*) and assumes a decisive role in the book on the *Baroque Drama*. This dialogue, however, continues and grows, albeit in a less visible way, even during the so-called historical-

⁶ See J. Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, ed. A. Assmann and J. Assmann, trans. D. Hollander, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA 2004. On Taubes' theses cfr. T. Tagliacozzo, *Jacob Taubes interprete della teologia politica di Walter Benjamin*, in "Paradigmi. Rivista di critica filosofica", anno XIX, n. 56, Nuova Serie, maggio agosto 2001, pp. 283-311.

⁷ I refer here to G. Agamben, *The Time that remains. A Commentar to the letter of the Romans*, trans. P. Dailey, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA 2005. On Agamben's theses see A. Deuber-Mankowsky, *The Image of Happiness We Harbor: The Messianic Power of Weakness in Cohen, Benjamin and Paul*, "New German Critique", No. 105, Political Theology (Fall, 2008), pp. 57-69.

⁸ See A. Deuber-Mankowsky, *Der frühe Walter Benjamin und Hermann Cohen. Jüdische Werte, kritische Philosophie, vergängliche Erfahrung*, Vorwerk 8, Berlin 2000; T. Tagliacozzo, *Esperienza e compito infinito nella filosofia del primo Benjamin*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2003; P. Fenves, *The messianic reduction. Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA 2011; P. Fiorato, "Zeitlos und dennoch nicht ohne historischen Belang". *Über die idealen Zusammenhänge der Geschichte bei dem jungen Benjamin und Hermann Cohen*, in "MLN", vol. 127, No. 3, april 2012, pp- 611-624 (this issue of „MLN“ is entirely devoted to "Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem and the Marburg School").

materialist period, until the last writings. The references to the nexus between universal history and the messianic idea of humanity, that run all through the preliminary notes for the Theses, are the most eloquent testimony of the persistence of a philosophical confrontation with Cohen. Undoubtedly, in these references the peculiar voice of Benjamin's philosophy does not lose its timbre. The ground, in which this nexus is expressed and problematically articulated, is, in fact, that of language and of the "task" of translation as a figure of the messianic tension to overcome the fragmentation of History and the Babelic plurality of languages. As we know, Benjamin here refuses explicitly (with an eloquent allusion to the old master and his ethical *Sozialismus*) to intend the "infinite" of this task in the sense, above all, of being purely directed toward the future.

Cohen's messianic Futurism, in *Die Religion der Vernunft*, concludes with the prophetic idea of peace. The work was published posthumously, after the end of a war to which Cohen had adhered, hoping for the cessation of that division between Judentum and Deutschtum, about which Benjamin had never harbored illusions. At the time he is working on the *Theses on the concept of history*, Benjamin faces a war, which he considers as a necessary step and at the same time as the bearer of a huge destruction, as he had already realized with prophetic clarity in 1930, reviewing the anthology *Krieg und Krieger* edited by Ernst Jünger⁹. The very different historical constellation under which Benjamin's *Theses* are thought – in comparison with the equally epochal constellation in which Cohen's *Religion der Vernunft* was published – can explain only in part Benjamin's criticism of the link between ethical messianism and future, which is at the hearth of Cohen's posthumous book. This criticism does not take away remove, however, the critical prod of prophecy from Benjamin's messianism. If anything, Benjamin remarks that the political meaning of the prophecy concerns first the present time. Indeed, the present is the real object of the Messianic prophecy and of its critical energy. However, if Benjamin's messianism would stop at this step, it might be still absorbed in a more traditional perspective such as that of Cohen. The originality of Benjamin's position consists, in fact, in his reversing the time perspective of prophecy, making of the remembrance (*Eingedenken*) the hinge of the "small door" (the infinitesimal time) through which might enter, at every instant, the Messiah. For this reason, namely for this reversal of the Messianic time, "Criticism and Prophecy" are the

⁹ See W. Benjamin, *Theorien des deutschen Faschismus*, in Id., *Gesammelte Schriften*, hrsg. von R. Tiedemann und H. Schweppenhäuser, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M 1972-1989, Vol. III, 1972, pp. 238-250.

two categories that contribute to fulfill the task of the "Rettung der Vergangenheit"¹⁰. To Cohen's thesis, according to which "der Messianismus ist die Quintessenz des Monotheismus"¹¹, it is possible to add then (and perhaps not entirely to oppose) Benjamin's thesis that sees in the *Eingedenken*, in the remembrance, the "quintessence" of the "theological conception of history" for the Jews¹².

Despite of this divergent direction of the Messianic time (toward the future, for Cohen and toward the past, for Benjamin), the idea of a non-eschatological messianism, which is so evident in Cohen's perspective¹³, applies also to the author of the *Theses on the concept of history*. In so far as he shares the criticism of the myth, which is implied in Cohen's connection between rationalism and monotheism, Benjamin shares also his consequent criticism of eschatology as a mythology of the end of time. Forasmuch as it connects rationality and messianism, this criticism does not understand the messianic time as radically different from the ordinary time and, therefore, as an end of time itself (the end, the *eschaton* as a limit of the time form, of which Kant investigated the aporias in his essay on *The end of all things*¹⁴). Both for Benjamin and for Cohen, it may well be valid Maimonides' admonition (mentioned by Scholem¹⁵ and contained in §§ 11-12 of Halakhoth, concerning the Installation of the King) not to think that "in the days of the Messiah anything of the natural course, of the world will cease or that any innovation will be introduced into creation. Rather, the world will continue in its accustomed course". These days, in which the Torah can be understood in its literality and every allegory will be explained (even those relating to the Messiah), "the binding force of the law does not cease and the lawful order of nature does not give way to any miracles"¹⁶.

For Benjamin, as for Cohen, the Messianic understanding of historical time produces a crisis in the traditional image of history as a homogeneous course of events and in the perception of time as a pure flow. Certainly - in the case of Benjamin - this crisis takes the form of an arrest and of an interruption, not of time as such, but of its apparent

¹⁰ W. Benjamin, *Werke und Nachlaß*, vol. 19, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, cit., p. 137.

¹¹ H. Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, cit., p. 463.

¹² W. Benjamin, *Werke und Nachlaß*, vol. 19, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, cit., p. 142.

¹³ Cfr. P. Fiorato, *Notes on Future and History in Hermann Cohen's Anti-Eschatological Messianism*. In: R. Munk (ed.), *Hermann Cohen's Critical Idealism* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), pp. 133-160 (Amsterdam Studies in Jewish Thought vol. 10).

¹⁴ On this Kantian essay see F. Desideri, *Quartetto per la fine del tempo. Una costellazione kantiana*, Marietti, Genova 1991.

¹⁵ See G. Scholem, *Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism* in Id., *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, Schocken, New York 1971, pp. 28-29.

¹⁶ *Ivi*, p. 30.

continuity. To understand this interruption in the sense of an Antinomism, as Taubes does, by assuming Benjamin's messianism as Pauline-Marcionite, is not legitimate. First, because Taubes does not see that the "telos nomou" of Romans 10.4 has to be assumed as a fulfillment (culmination) and not as a mere interruption / suppression of the law, as it was perfectly understood by Karl Barth in his famous work¹⁷, *The Epistle to the Romans*, which Taubes refers to. Second, for the reason that Benjamin does not mean the messianic idea in a Christological sense. This is already attested in a letter to Scholem of October 22, 1917, where Benjamin, commenting on Harnack's *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, claims that the Christian/Pauline concept of faith is foreign to Judaism¹⁸, and it is confirmed by the *Theological-Political Fragment*, especially in its critical reference to Bloch's *Spirit of utopia*. In addition, the Marcionite radicalization of eschatology, which is defended by Taubes as the authentic interpretation of the Pauline theology, would lead to that rehabilitation of myth that every dualism inevitably brings with itself. Consequently, it would deny, at the same time, that idea of a creatural world, which is central for Benjamin's philosophy and in particular for the crucial relationship between language and revelation. Without this assumption, we could not recognize the restorative trait that, jointly with its more evident catastrophic-apocalyptic aspect, defines Benjamin's messianism. The unity between the restorative and the catastrophic dimension of messianism is certainly the most difficult problem to think of in the context of that theology that is necessary for a genuine understanding of history. A problem to which Benjamin does not intend to give an eschatological solution. In so far as he understands the day of judgment as indistinct from each other ("every moment is the moment of the judgment on certain moments that preceded it")¹⁹, Benjamin identifies the critical frontier of the messianic interruption in the profane course of time, into the depths of its texture, and not at its eschatological limit. In this critical shift, time is caught in the image of a single catastrophe: as a truth that falls in the "now" and threatens to be delivered to nothing: annihilated. With this image, however, flits the possibility of the *restitutio in integrum*. It flashes for an infinitesimal fragment of time, but this temporal fragment, this *Jetzt-zeit* contains splinters of messianic time. In its fragmentarity shines then the *Star of Redemption*. It shines with the weak strength of a reflection, as it were

¹⁷ For this issue see A. Pangritz, «Ende des Gesetzes» (Röm 10, 4)? Anmerkungen zur Barth-Lektüre von Jacob Taubes in AA.VV., *Torah Nomos Ius*, Vorwerk 8, Berlin 1999, pp. 187-201

¹⁸ See W. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, hrsg. von Christoph Gödde und Henri Lonitz, VI voll., Vol. I, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1995, pp. 388-397.

¹⁹ W. Benjamin, *Werke und Nachlaß*, vol. 19, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, cit., p. 135.

caught by the melancholic look of a careful and vigilant conscience that, listening to the echo of the lament that arises from the past, shatters the appearance of the historical absoluteness. History splits then itself into images that reveal a dialectic character. In fact, these images come from the *disiecta membra* of the past, overturning their allegorical meaning of death and defeat. To capture these images, to recognize them promptly in their darting lightning, means to give expression to their truth and to grow, then, the revelation of the *Shekhinah* in time.

Just in the dialectic of this unintentional recognition of truth, which occurs in the flashing of the image for the involuntary memory, we can gather the subtlest philosophical difference between Benjamin and Cohen at the point of their greatest proximity. I mean here indeed the conceptual figure of origin, which - as we know - Benjamin proposed to be understood in a historical sense rather than in a logical one. As a radically historical opening of time in the difference or in the infinitesimal gap between creation and redemption and between revelation and restoration, the notion of origin that Benjamin defines means both a criticism of Cohen's idealism and the dialectic that is inherent to the constitutive incompleteness of what emerges as *Ursprung*. The meaning of this difference, in comparison with the character of a logical grounding that Cohen's category of origin retained, had already been foreshadowed in a short remark that Benjamin made, in 1929, about Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*. Here, Benjamin presents Rosenzweig's book as "a system of the Jewish theology," also a book born in wartime "in the Macedonians trenches" and, above all, a book that represents "a victorious irruption of the Hegelian dialectic in the Religion of reason from the sources of Judaism"²⁰. In Benjamin's conversion of the origin from a logical to a historical category, it seems to resonate the echo of this irruption of the Hegelian dialectic. In particular seems to resonate the echo of the pages where Rosenzweig interprets in an Hegelian sense the Cohenian theme of the rational origin of reality, as a continuum from "the infinite as infinitesimal"²¹: as an uninterrupted generation of a curve approximation to the "absoluteness of the point" (*Absolutheit des Punktes*). With explicit reference to Hegel, Rosenzweig radicalizes the ontological character of the differential as a restless unit of nothing and something.

²⁰ W. Benjamin, *Bücher, die lebendig geblieben sind*, in Id., *Gesammelte Schriften*, cit., Vol. III, pp. 170-171.

²¹ Cfr. John H. Smith, *The Infinitesimal as Theological Principle: Representing the Paradoxes of God and Nothing in Cohen, Rosenzweig, Scholem, and Barth*, in "MLN", vol. 127, No. 3, april 2012, pp. 562-588 and, in particular, p. 570.

The amendment to the Hegelian dialectic that Benjamin proposes in the theoretical notes devoted to *Passagen-Werk* consists in converting it into an imaginal dialectic that is substantially fed by a differential time. Dialectic is, in fact, the work on the quasi-nothing of the past that rekindles hope in it. Dialectic is the oscillation between the “being-no-more”²² of the past and its being redeemed in a fragment of actuality: in the now of its recognizability. As expression of the origin-actuality, this time fragment has the monadic character of an intensive totality. In the messianic understanding of time as something that is discretely composed by monadic fragments, the origin arises as the goal: as an emergency of truth and an interruption of temporal continuity at the same time. In brief, the origin presents itself as inherent to a critical revelation of truth. In conclusion, Benjamin in his last meditations on history contrasts Cohen's endless task of the messianic future with the redemption of the “oppressed past”. As an apperception of time as a monad, this idea of redemption has the character of a process *in infinitum*. The redeemed world, that is the world of an integral actuality where the past had become “citable in all its moments”, needs, from an epistemological point of view, the method of the Apokatastasis. Consequently, Benjamin transforms, in the dialectic between incompleteness and revelation that is inherent to the origin, the Cohenian idea of an infinite task into the infinitely intensive process of a *restitutio in integrum*. In the chance to think in a monadic way the time fragment, the entire course of history can be “guarded and preserved”: saved. Yet, not like something “other” than a fragment that confirms the incompleteness of origin²³ as the unity of catastrophe and redemption. In this idea of the origin, which is related with the unfulfillable character of Justice, consists then the theological and philosophical peculiarity of Walter Benjamin as unmistakable voice of the Jewish thought in the twentieth century.

²² “Being past, being no more, is passionately at work in things. [...] Arcades are such monuments of being-no-more. And the energy that works in them is dialectics. [...] And nothing of them lasts except the name: passages. ... But their name was now like a filter which let through only the most intimate. The bitter essence of what had been” (W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin, Harvard University Press, Harvard 1999, pp. 833-834)

²³ With regard to the incompleteness of origin, see what Benjamin writes in the *Epistemo-Critical Prologue* to the book on Baroque Drama: “That which is original is never revealed in the naked and manifest existence of the factual; its rhythm is apparent only to a dual insight. On the one hand it needs to be recognized as a process of restoration and reestablishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something imperfect and incomplete.” (W. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. J. Osborne, Verso, London New York 1998, p. 45)

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